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TAGS: IZ KIRF PGOV PHUM PREL

SUBJECT: MALIKI VOICES SUPPORT FOR RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Classified By: By Deputy Political Counselor Ellen Germain for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Prime Minister Maliki received a delegation of mostly Christian representatives and spoke out in support of Iraq's religious minorities during his May 16 visit to Mosul to inspect the ongoing Umm-al-Rabe'ayn operation to root out al-Qaida elements. His unprecedented statements were highlighted in a press release from his media office (see text in para 3). According to the press release, in his meeting with the delegation, Maliki emphasized that Christians are an integral part of Iraq and threatened severe punishment for those who harm them. He also promised more economic development and services in the area. Maliki appealed to minorities to join the Iraqi armed forces and to the Christian community to be loyal to Iraq, stressing that the GOI will steadfastly support religious freedom and the rule of law in Iraq.

¶2. (C) The Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) mayor of Tel Keif, Basem Belo told PRT Nineva that the idea for the meeting was initiated by Shabak Council of Representatives member Hunain al-Qado, who had contacted several minority groups in advance to try to encourage them to come to Mosul for the Maliki meeting. (Note: Since the meeting was initiated by a Shabak CoR member, it was not entirely a meeting with Christians, but rather a meeting of religious minorities, probably dominated by Christians. End note.) Belo said he had used the opportunity of a UNAMI meeting at the PRT on the same day, which is adjacent to the Iraqi Army base, where the PM's meeting was held, as an opportunity to meet with the PM. The ADM delegation included several members from across Nineva province, including the villages in Tel Keif and al-Hamdaniya. Belo said the group discussed Christian participation in the Iraqi Security Forces in the Nineva Plain.

¶3. (U) Begin text of unofficial translation of the May 16, 2008 press release from the Media Office of the Office of the Prime Minister: (Note: The translation was provided by the Prime Minister's Media Office. End Note)

Prime Minister Nouri Kamel al-Maliki said that the Christians are known as advocates of peace and love and they have stuck to the land of Iraq and never advocated violence. Whoever is targeting them would commit then a doubled crime and we shall face them strongly. The operation Umm al-Rabi'ayn (city of two springs: Mosul) will continue until the situation becomes stable and closed roads and bridges are opened. We will work to develop services and increase the amounts allocated for building, reconstruction and investment.

During his meeting with a delegation from the Christian community in Mosul at his residence in Nineva operation command today, the PM stressed that operation Umm al-Rabi'ayn aims at ending the suffering of Mosul people, including Christians who are a rose in Mosul's garden. PM also added, "we have many solutions to re-impose law and return the families displaced of different affiliations. We want the sons of Christians, Shabaks, and Yazids to join the armed

forces. Iraqis must understand that today they are fighting ideologies, methods and ways of Baath which wore a dress of al-Qaeda. Their dreams of the return will never be achieved."

PM called on the Christian community to uphold the homeland, not bow to threats and blackmail. PM said that the government will stand along side whoever is subjected to persecution and oppression until matters are back to normal, religious freedom and places of worship are respected, and the rule of law is all over Iraq. Earlier today, PM had met with a delegation from the people of Tall Afar city.

End text.

CROCKER